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AUTHOR Lewis, Nancy; Sbaratta, Philip
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ABSTRACT

This packet of competency-based instructional materials was developed for use in all sections of North Shore Community College's developmental composition course. Introductory material traces the development of the competency-based system at the college, which stemmed from a need for a more consistent approach in the composition classes. Next, the student materials are presented. First, a rationale for the course and its basic premises are highlighted (e.g., writing is learned by writing, writing problems are often thinking problems, and writing is a process involving particular stages). Next, course procedures are specified, including attendance requirements, writing tasks, solution plan for writing problems, the role of student assistants, grading, class session requirements, and maintenance of a record of progress. Then, stages in the composing process are outlined, including listing details and finding a focus, writing a thesis statement and outline, preparing first and subsequent drafts, revising until the composition meets specified criteria, and preparing the final draft after the instructor's approval to proceed is obtained. Instructions for completing eight composition assignments are then provided, which specify the task, indicate the audience and length of the composition, and discuss important concepts and ways to proceed. The course final examination concludes the packet. (HB)

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A COMPETENCY-BASED SYSTEM FOR COMPOSITION

Nancy Lewis
Philip Sbaratta

North Shore Community College
Beverly, Massachusetts

JC 830 343

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COMPETENCY-BASED SYSTEM FOR COMPOSITION

Introduction

After years of floundering with students with serious writing problems, the English Department at North Shore Community College began examining the personalized system of instruction (PSI) as a format for a composition course. Although the Department had an efficient assessment process in place, multiple visions of what an effective developmental writing course should be created unmanageable variations from instructor to instructor. The vague common goal of teaching good writing did not provide a firm foundation for curriculum development.

The English Department needed to begin at the beginning -- stating clearly what the aims of such a course are. This discussion produced a statement of core objectives, which served as the keystone for all sections of developmental composition. Although this was a step forward, other problems had to be deferred for future consideration. For example, what about students who need more than one semester? How can we build in the processes of rewrite and revision? How can we deal with the wide spread of writing ability? What about the various rates of progress? How can instruction be individualized? How can the writing proces be emphasized?

Raising these questions led the English Department to the PSI format. The initial curriculum was developed and "piloted" by a small number of faculty. The results so impressed the English Department that it eventually adopted the curriculum for all sections of developmental composition for both day and evening students. This is a fairly revolutionary step. Imagine twenty-five English professors using the same materials, teaching the same assignments, using the same classroom approach, grading by the same standards, and giving the same final examination.

In short, the competency system for composition has provided the means to center instruction around a set of clearly articulated assumptions. The universality of the curriculum also permits the clearing of channels of communication when instructors meet to discuss developmental composition. Instead of each person having to

explain the who-what-when-where-how of his particular version of developmental composition, there is the common ground of a shared curriculum. The program provides instructors and students with a clear prospectus for the course, a statement of intended outcomes, and a plan of how to achieve them.

COURSE RATIONALE FOR:

ENGLISH I: CMP 101

No matter what program you are in, you will be required to write papers and take essay exams in many of your courses. You will need to submit letters of application to other schools and to potential employers. In many fields, your position will require the preparation of written reports. As a college student and a college graduate, you will need to know how to write, and your writing will need to conform to established standards of written English.

The individualized, developmental approach to English I is founded upon certain basic premises:

1. You learn to write by writing, not by talking about writing or doing exercises. Because most students in English I have had little writing experience, you will have extensive practice in writing.

2. Writing problems are often thinking problems. You will be encouraged to find something to say and will learn a logical, precise way to say it.

3. Writing is a process. Thus, your writing instruction will consist of individualized guidance at the various stages in the process of composing a written piece.

4. Grammar, punctuation, and usage are not ends in themselves but aids to clearer and more effective communication. Thus, your instruction in standards of written English will be considered as part of the writing process.

This course provides you with a structured approach to the writing process. If you master this process, we can guarantee improvement of your writing ability. After some preliminary material, you will work on individualized structured writing assignments. These assignments will enable you to draw upon your own experience for content material. The instructor will offer personalized guidance for each step of each writing assignment and will help you work out plans for revising and for eliminating errors on future assignments.

If you approach the course with a desire to write well and with a determination to put into it the necessary time and effort, you will learn to communicate accurately and effectively and will reach a level of writing proficiency enabling you to enter the required English II course. By developing responsibility for your own writing progress you will be able to complete English II successfully.

In order to graduate from NSCC, you are required to complete English I and English II.

COURSE PROCEDURES

1. Attendance

Because individualized guidance by the instructor is essential to your success in the course, only three unexcused absences for M/W/F course and two unexcused absences for T/TH course are permitted. If you exceed this number, you will be asked to leave the course.

2. Writing Tasks

a. In order to complete the course in one semester, you must have:

2 tasks completed by the end of the 5th week
4 tasks completed by the end of the 9th week
6 tasks completed by the end of the 14th week

b. You must complete the tasks in sequence, following the steps in the composing process for each composition.

c. You must complete the grammar component of Tasks 1 and 5 before receiving points for the task.

3. Solution Plan

a. For errors in grammar, punctuation, and mechanics, recommendations will be made on the Solution Plan sheet.

b. You will be expected to complete assigned exercises and pass a mastery test; the assistant will grade the test when you finish.

4. Student Assistants

a. Student assistants will provide help in completion of grammatical exercises and will administer and grade mastery tests.

b. Student assistants are responsible for maintaining accurate records of student attendance and student progress through the course.

c. Note: Student assistants may not approve any step in the composing process. You must receive approval from an instructor.

5. GRADES

80% of the course grade is determined by the number of points you accumulate. Each approved writing task is worth 10 points.

The final exam, a composition written in class within a specified time period, is graded and the grade reflected in points according to the following formula:

A - 20
B - 16
C - 12
D - 8
F - 0

Your final grade for the course is determined by the following formula:

A - 96-100
B - 86-95
C - 72-85

6. CLASS SESSIONS

Although instructors may require additional activities to help develop writing skill, the major activity of the course is writing under the guidance of the instructor.

a. During writing sessions, pick up a numbered card to reserve an appointment with the instructor.

b. Sign attendance sheet for each session.

c. Maintain quiet. Silence is an essential condition for writing; students who cannot conform to this requirement will be asked to leave.

d. Bring to each class session: English I Procedures and Tasks Booklet, textbooks, dictionary, lined paper, and pen. Writing must be done in ink.

e. While writing rough drafts, write on every other line.

7. RECORD OF PROGRESS

a. Each student will have a folder on which attendance and completion of tasks will be recorded.

b. Student assistants are responsible for maintaining accurate records.

c. If is <u>your</u> responsibility to bring paper, mastery test, etc. to the instructor or student assistant to record appropriate information before you leave the Writing Laboratory.

d. Keep all drafts of each writing task <u>until final draft is approved by instructor</u>.

The Composing Process

1. List Details And Find A Focus

a. List many specific details about your general topic without regard to order. Avoid dead words like good, nice, and beautiful.

b. Find a focus by answering these questions:

Do the details add up to anything?
What overall point do I want to make?
Which details are most important?

2. Write A Thesis Statement And Outline

a. Write a sentence stating the main point about your topic.

b. Choose 3 or 4 significant details from your list to support your thesis statement.

c. Arrange the details in some kind of logical order.

RECEIVE AN INSTRUCTOR'S APPROVAL TO PROCEED

3. Write The First Draft, Write Subsequent Drafts, As Necessary, Revising Until The Composition Meets These Criteria For Acceptance

a. Logical organization

b. Adequate development

c. Opening and closing statements

d. Effective word choice

e. No grammatical, punctuation, or spelling errors

RECEIVE AN INSTRUCTOR'S APPROVAL TO PROCEED

4. With The Instructor's Approval, Prepare The Final Draft In Correct Manuscript Form

a. Lined paper

b. Ink

c. Correct heading (name, course, date, listed at top right corner)

d. Margins

e. Uniform indentations of paragraphs

f. Title

RECEIVE AN INSTRUCTOR'S APPROVAL TO PROCEED

TASK I - A. WRITE A NARRATIVE RELATING A PERSONAL INCIDENT

AUDIENCE: ANY READER

LENGTH: 200-300 WORDS

FOR A GENERAL STATEMENT OF THE PROCEDURE, CONSULT THE COMPOSING PROCESS ON PAGE 5.

1. DEFINITION: At its simplest, narration is telling a story. At its broadest, it is any development - in sentence, paragraph, or paper - by chronological order.

2. Choose an interesting (exciting, funny, tragic, etc.) incident in your life. Limit yourself to one brief event. The incident must have taken place in a matter of minutes or hours, not in days, weeks, or months.

3. Freely list all the details you can recall about the incident. Use details drawn as much as possible from all five senses: sight, sound, smell, touch, taste. Be as specific and concrete as possible.

4. Determine what point you are trying to make about the experience.

5. Choose the details that seem most important in relating the experience. Arrange them in chronological order (time sequence). This is your outline.

6. Write the narration, using the first person (I), past tense, and chronological (time) sequence. Give the incident form. The beginning should introduce the characters, set the scene, and stimulate your reader's interest. As early as possible, you should establish a conflict which needs to be resolved or create suspense which needs to be relieved. Use action and description to develop the conflict and dramatize the incident. The narration should rise to some sort of climax before dropping off to a conclusion. Keep a consistent tone (amused, angry, exasperated, horror-striken, etc.) to express your attitude toward the incident and to involve the reader in your point of view.

7. Use specific, concrete details and action words to relate the incident vividly. Use the active voice (a verb with direct object) and vary your sentence constructions to gain emphasis. Use effective transitions between major details.

TASK I - B. COMPLETE REQUIRED GRAMMAR EXERCISES; THEN IDENTIFY INDEPENDENT AND DEPENDENT CLAUSES IN NARRATIVE.

Attend class lecture on recognition of subjects & verbs.

Study pages in text relating to recognition of subjects & verbs that the instructor assigns.

Do exercises assigned by instructor. In each section, after you do one section of exercises, check answer sheet in back of book before going on to the next. Note with an X those sentences in which you made an error; go over these sentences with instructor or student assistants to determine the source of your errors.

Attend class lecture on identification of independent and dependent clauses.

Study pages in text relating to identification of independent and dependent clauses that the instructor assigns.

After you have completed the exercises, underline in pencil those independent clauses (1 line) and dependent clauses (2 lines) that appear in the final draft of your narrative.

TASK II. WRITE A PARAGRAPH DESCRIBING A PROCESS AT WHICH YOU ARE AN EXPERT.

AUDIENCE: SOMEONE WHO DOES NOT KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THE PROCESS AND TO WHOM YOU ARE TEACHING THE PROCESS.

LENGTH: 150-200 WORDS

FOR A GENERAL STATEMENT OF THE PROCEDURE, CONSULT THE COMPOSING PROCESS ON PAGE 5.

1. Choose some process at which you consider yourself an expert. It may be something as simple as making a bed or putting off doing homework and write down everything that is involved in the process. Be specific. (Do not choose the preparation of a particular dish, i.e., a recipe.)

2. Determine the purpose of the process and state this in a sentence that will catch the reader's interest. This is your thesis statement.

3. Physically go through the process, writing down all the main steps you go through in exact sequence. This is your outline. Each point in your outline shall begin with a specific, active verb, i.e., turn, press, wipe, close, etc.

4. Write the paragraph, using the command verb pattern. Include all necessary details. Use logical transitions between major steps, i.e., after, then, finally, etc.

TASK III. WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR OF YOUR LOCAL NEWSPAPER OR THE SCHOOL NEWSPAPER THE PENNON EXPRESSING YOUR VIEWPOINTS ON A SPECIFIC LOCAL MATTER OF CONCERN TO YOU.

AUDIENCE: EDITOR AND READERS OF NEWSPAPER

LENGTH: 150-200 WORDS

NOTE: WHEN FINAL DRAFT IS APPROVED, THE LETTER WILL BE MAILED. A BONUS POINT WILL BE AWARDED IF YOU CAN SHOW EVIDENCE YOUR LETTER HAS BEEN PRINTED.

1. Choose a specific local issue about which you feel strongly and about which you have some knowledge. Make a list of specific details you know about the issue.
2. Looking over your list, write a statement that sums up what you feel about the issues. Be precise. This is your thesis statement.
3. Now choose from your list at least 3 specific details, facts, examples, that best support and develop your thesis statement and arrange them in order, from least important to most important. This is your outline.
4. Begin your letter by stating your thesis. If you are replying to an article or another letter, refer to the date and subject.
5. Develop each point in your outline into a short, clear paragraph. (In a business letter, paragraphs generally are short - 2 or 3 sentences). Include facts that support each main point. Be sure these supportive details are accurate; check them if you need to.
6. Present your opinion reasonably, but forcefully.
7. Conclude politely, perhaps with a simple thank you.
8. When writing the final draft, follow standard business letter format for the letter and envelope. (If you do not have business envelopes, see instructor).
9. After final draft has been approved, fold letter in thirds and give to instructor to mail. (If letter is for The Pennon, simply drop in appropriate box in SR306/307).

TASK IV. WRITE TWO DIFFERENT KINDS OF ESSAYS ON AN ARTICLE: (1) A PRÉCIS, A CONDENSATION OF THE ARTICLE; (2) AN ESSAY QUESTION RESPONSE WHICH DEMONSTRATES UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT YOU HAVE READ.

PRECISE: AUDIENCE: A FELLOW STUDENT NOT IN CLASS WHEN ARTICLE WAS DISCUSSED.

LENGTH: 150-200 WORDS

ESSAY: AUDIENCE: THE INSTRUCTOR OF A COURSE INVOLVING THE SUBJECT OF THE ARTICLE.

LENGTH: 150-200 WORDS

FOR A GENERAL STATEMENT OF THE PROCEDURE, CONSULT THE COMPOSING PROCESS ON PAGE 5.

1. You will be given several articles from which you may choose the one that interests you most. The purpose of the précis is to express as briefly as possible the author's ideas in your own words. The précis is an abridgement of a work, not your own ideas or bias. It is a valuable tool to aid in understanding what is read.

2. Read the article several times. Use the dictionary for words you do not understand. If you have difficulty understanding the article, consult your instructor.

3. Underline the topic sentence in each paragraph. Sometimes you may find that several paragraphs express one idea. When this is the case, place brackets around the paragraphs and underline the sentence that contains the key idea for the group of paragraphs.

4. Rewrite the underlined sentences in your own words. Express the author's ideas precisely and effectively.

5. Avoid the phrase "The author says....." and express the author's ideas as if they were your own.

6. Write a sentence that summarizes the central idea of the article. This is your thesis statement.

7. Look over your list of sentences (#4). Write 3 or 4 sentences expressing the author's major ideas, his major points that develop and support his central idea. Arrange these in logical order. It is possible that your order may differ somewhat from the author's. This is your outline.

8. Write a paragraph, using effective transitional words and phrases, between key ideas. Use the same tense and person used in the article.

-THIS CONCLUDES THE PRÉCIS-

ESSAY IN RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. When your précis is completed and accepted, your instructor will give you a set of 3 essay questions on the article you chose. You will write a 100-200 word essay on one of these questions in class.

2. To begin, read all of the questions carefully and consider each one before making your choice. You should pick the one you find easiest to do.

3. Before writing you should jot down on scrap paper all the important ideas about the subject you can think of so you know what you have to say.

4. Essay examinations have common terms that indicate how you are expected to demonstrate your knowledge. Some of these terms are:

   a. DISCUSS: Present an orderly statement of all the important aspects of the subject with your own ideas clearly identified.

   b. EVALUATE OR CRITICIZE: Present all relevant facts and necessary examples, and pass judgment, favorable or unfavorable. Emphasize judgment.

   c. COMPARE OR CONTRAST: If you are asked to compare, give a full account of the similarities and dissimilarities; if asked to contrast, give only the dissimilarities. Lead off with an overall statement.

5. Write your essay using the ideas you put on scrap paper organized in the manner required by the question. Be sure to state your thesis clearly in the beginning so that your examiner knows exactly what you are saying from the start.

6. Finally, before passing the essay in, you should ask yourself the following questions:

   a. Have I answered all the parts of the question?
   b. Have I answered the question completely, or have I left too much to the instructor's imagination?
   c. Are all the words spelled correctly? Are the other mechanics of my paper reasonably correct?
   d. Is my name and other required identification on the paper?

TASK V - A. WRITE AN ESSAY PERSUADING SOMEONE TO TRY AN ACTIVITY YOUR ENJOY.

AUDIENCE: AN ACQUAINTANCE

LENGTH: 300-400 WORDS (MINIMUM, 5 PARAGRAPHS)

FOR A GENERAL STATEMENT OF THE PROCEDURE, CONSULT THE COMPOSING PROCESS ON PAGE 5.

1. Select an activity that you enjoy and that you feel will be enjoyed by others, i.e., cross country skiing, painting, camping, reading, working at a part-time job, etc.

2. List all the benefits to be gained from trying the activity. Be specific.

3. Looking over your list, write a statement that sums up the major general benefits that you feel can be gained from engaging in the activity. This is your thesis statement.

4. From your list, select the 3 or 4 points that best develop and support your thesis statement; each point should state a specific benefit to be gained from the activity. You may want to add supportive points that are not on the list. Under each point, include at least 2 subpoints. Arrange these points in some kind of logical order, perhaps from least important to most important. This is your outline.

5. Write the essay, persuading someone to try the activity. In your introductory paragraph, briefly arouse the reader's interest in the activity and state your thesis. Devote a paragraph to each point in your outline; each point should be stated as a topic sentence of each paragraph. Make sure to develop each point sufficiently, by details and examples, to convince the reader of each benefit to be gained by the activity. Write a concluding paragraph reiterating, in somewhat different words, your thesis.

6. Vary sentences, including simple, compound, and complex.

TASK V - B. COMPLETE REQUIRED ASSIGNMENTS ON TYPES OF SENTENCES; THEN IDENTIFY TYPES OF SENTENCES IN ESSAY.

Attend class lecture on sentence types. Do assignment given by instructor.

After you have completed the assignment, identify each type of sentence in final draft of essay: with pencil, underline simple sentences with one line, compound sentences with two lines, and complex sentences with three lines.

TASK VI. WRITE AN ESSAY ARGUING YOUR POINT OF VIEW.

AUDIENCE: A PERSON WITH AN OPPOSING POINT OF VIEW.

LENGTH: 300-400 WORDS

FOR A GENERAL STATEMENT OF THE PROCEDURE, CONSULT THE COMPOSING PROCESS ON PAGE 5.

1. Choose a controversial subject as the topic of your argument. Be sure that your subject is one about which you have some interest and knowledge. List everything that you can think of about the subject and your ideas on it.

2. Look over your list to determine your position on the controversial issue. Your position is the main argument. Decide on the strongest objection to your position. This is the counterargument. From your list, choose 3 to 4 supporting arguments that develop and support your main argument. List the evidence under each supporting argument. Arrange your supporting arguments according to importance, the most important one last. This arrangement of supporting arguments (main points) and evidence (subpoints) is your outline.

3. Your thesis statement should begin with an although clause that states the counterargument, then a main clause that states the main argument and then a because clause that states the supporting arguments. For example, Although cats scratch (counterargument) cats make excellent pets (main argument) because they are easy to care for, inexpensive to care for, and friendly animals (supporting arguments).

4 Write an essay attempting to convince your reader of your position on the topic of controversy. Write an effective introductory paragraph that includes your thesis statement and arouses your reader's interest in your topic.

5. Your first development paragraph should state the counterargument and then refute or concede it. Each subsequent development paragraph should be devoted to a supporting argument plus the evidence that supports and develops the argument.

6. Make the facts sound interesting. Use careful diction and define crucial terms. Use effective transitions between arguments.

7. Reinforce your argument in your concluding paragraph. You may take a wider view at the end of the essay and write about the possible significance or future development of your subject.

TASK VII. WRITE AN ESSAY OF COMPARISON.

AUDIENCE: INSTROCTOR

LENGTH: 300-400 WORDS

FOR A GENERAL STATEMENT OF THE PROCEDURE, CONSULT THE COMPOSING PROCESS ON PAGE 5.

1. Choose 2 subjects that lend themselves to effective comparison of likeness and/or differences. The subject should have some common basis, i.e., two schools, two teachers of the same subject, two newspapers, two somewhat similar groups, etc.

2. List all the likenesses and/or differences that you can think of between the subjects.

3. Looking over your list, determine the major point of comparison. Express this in a sentence; this is your thesis statement.

4. If focusing on similarities, choose from your list 3 points that best develop the similarity. If focusing on differences, choose 3 points that best develop the difference. Under each point, include at least 2 subpoints. Arrange your points in some kind of logical order.

5. Write a paragraph, using one of the two basic internal structures for an essay of comparison: a) the block form, and b) the shuttle form.*

   BLOCK FORM:

   1) Create a topic sentence summarizing the main features about A (one school, for example).

   2) Select examples illustrating the main features about A.

   3) Use a transition to B (on the other hand, similarly).

   4) Create a topic sentence summarizing the main features about B (the other school).

   5) Select examples illustrating the main features about B in relation to the main points raised about A.

* English Competence Handbook, prepared by Phillips Andover Academy, Andover, Mass.

SHUTTLE FORM:

1) Create a topic sentence summarizing a major point of comparison between A and B.

2) Select examples from both A and B, illustrating the point of comparison.

3) Use a transition to the next major point of comparison between A and B.

4) Repeat steps 1 - 3 for each major point of comparison.

6. Write a short introductory paragraph in which you introduce your subjects and state the major point of comparison (your thesis sentence). Conclude with a paragraph summarizing, in somewhat different words, the major point of comparison.

TASK VIII. WRITE AN ESSAY ANALYZING A CHARACTER IN A SHORT STORY.

AUDIENCE: AN ENGLISH INSTRUCTOR

LENGTH: 300-400 WORDS

FOR A GENERAL STATEMENT OF THE PROCEDURE, CONSULT THE COMPOSING PROCESS ON PAGE 5.

1. The purpose of this assignment is to analyze a character in a short story. You understand a character in fiction by examining and interpreting the evidence that the author has given you about the character. This evidence consists of what the author has written about the character, what the character says and thinks, what the character does, and what the other characters say about him.

2. After you have read several short stories, choose a story that you enjoy and that contains a character who interests you. Reread the story, underlining key passages and keeping in mind the following two questions:

    1) How has the character changed during the course of the story?

    2) What are the main personal qualities or characteristics of the character?

3. Reread the story a third time, taking notes on the character as you read. Think about the character as you read the story, and write down your reflections.

4. Look over your underlinings and notes in order to form a central idea about the character. The thesis statement will be an overall conclusion or general statement that you make about the character.

5. You should organize your analysis in the following way:

    A) INTRODUCTION: The introductory paragraph should contain your thesis statement and a brief description of the character that you are analyzing.

    B) DEVELOPMENT: The development paragraphs should give evidence from the story to illustrate and support the central idea in your thesis statement. Each development paragraph must have a topic idea that supports the overall conclusion about the character contained in the thesis statement. You may organize your development paragraphs in two different ways:

        1) Organize the development paragraphs around central incidents in the story that reveal the character's personal qualities. Make sure that you show how these incidents reveal the character's nature.

2) Organize the development paragraphs around major qualities of the character such as kindness, intelligence, weakness, and self-deception. You must then show how the character's qualities are brought out in the story.

C) CONCLUSION: The concluding paragraph should show how the character that you have analyzed is related to the story as a whole.

6. After you have decided on the pattern of organization, write a brief outline. The outline should consist of the topic for each paragraph and the supporting details for each topic.

7. As you write your first draft, check your underlinings and notes for details.

8. If you quote a passage directly from the story (phrase, sentence, or several sentences to support a point), put the page number that contains the quote in parentheses immediately after the quote. Follow rules for punctuating quotations as indicated in your handbook.

NOTE: The title of a short story is indicated by quotation marks.

WRITE A COMPOSITION ON A TOPIC ASSIGNED BY THE INSTRUCTOR WITHIN A SPECIFIED TIME PERIOD (FINAL EXAMINATION).

AUDIENCE: TO BE DETERMINED BY THE INSTRUCTOR.

LENGTH: AROUND 300 WORDS

A few weeks before the end of the semester the instructor will state the terms and conditions under which the final composition will be written. Some instructors require that it be written during a class session, others during the final exam period; some give the topic ahead of time while others don't.

The instructor will grade the composition and assign points according to the formula stated on page 3.

ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges
8118 Math-Sciences Building
University of California
Los Angeles, California 90024

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